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ISSUE FOCUS:

President Bush Meets Prime Minister Erdogan at the White House

On Monday October 2 President Bush met with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan at the White House for one hour and forty minutes. All papers report that during the joint press conference between President Bush and Prime Minister Erdogan after the two leaders' meeting, Bush described Erdogan as "a friend and a man of peace." Bush praised Erdogan's economic policy by saying "I congratulate the prime minister and his government on the economic reforms, which are for the good of the Turkish people." Turkish papers find it surprising that Bush did not refer to the terrorist organization, PKK, by name during the press meeting. On Iran, President Bush stressed that talks would cease if Tehran produces nuclear weapons; Erdogan agreed saying such a development would adversely affect Turkey too. Papers also report Bush asked Erdogan to make use of his good ties with Syrian leader Bashar Assad to warn Damascus against complications in Lebanon. A "surprise" issue raised at the meeting was Darfur, according to papers. Bush told the press Erdogan conveyed his impressions of the ongoing tragedy in the region, calling on the UN to work on the issue.

After the meeting Erdogan told reporters the US President had no doubts with regard to the strategic partnership with Turkey: "Every step we take in the Middle East is the result of a strategic partnership between our two countries. We are allies in NATO. President Bush repeatedly thanked Turkey for the logistic support it has been providing in Iraq. He noted that Turkey has suffered the greatest number of casualties in Iraq after the US --- "only strategic partners speak like that," Erdogan emphasized. On the rising anti-American sentiments in Turkey, Erdogan said he believed the situation was not serious, and that "the elimination by the US of the PKK will eliminate the anti-Americanism in Turkey." Erdogan noted he also had a chance to discuss Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Cyprus and Turkey's EU drive with President Bush. On early Tuesday, Erdogan flew to London to meet British Prime Minister Blair before returning home in the afternoon today.

Ekrem Dumanli writing in the Islamist oriented-intellectual Zaman says that the meeting provided a chance for both countries to "renew their trust" in each other: "Washington seems to care for the ruling AK Party even more than before because there is no other strong right wing party, and there is also the fact that the US administration feels uneasy about the opposition party, CHP. The Bush-Erdogan meeting sends a clear message to Turkey. Mutual trust between the US administration and the ruling AKP has reached its peak in spite of many internal debates in Turkey. This meeting will undoubtedly reflect considerable progress for Turkey's expectations from the US, such as the fight against terror, economic cooperation and democratization. The visit of Erdogan to the White House provided the chance for both countries to renew their trust in each other."

Writing in the mainstream daily Milliyet, Washington-based Yasemin Congar thinks that the meeting cannot be called a success due to the lack of concrete action against PKK: "Reliable Turkish and American sources confirm that both leaders have different opinions on regional issues and there are unfulfilled expectations on each side. The main unfulfilled expectation for Turkey is clear action against the PKK in Iraq, and the meeting at the White House did not change this picture. Had Erdogan been able to get a solid promise from Bush regarding the PKK and make this public, then this meeting could have been regarded as a success. This did not happen. Furthermore, Bush, who reportedly spoke in decisive terms about the PKK during the meeting, was not equally resolute before the journalists. The US President's failure to mention the PKK by name, the organization's presence in Iraq or the losses to terrorism sustained by Turkey created a serious gap in the message."

ANKARA 00005746 002 OF 003

Mustafa Karaalioglu, commenting in the Islamist-opinion maker Yeni Safak, believes a big success came out of the Bush-Erdogan meeting: "The meeting at the White House provided a venue for a warm dialogue where everything related to bilateral ties was brought to the table for discussion. There was ongoing speculation prior to the meeting that Washington does not care about the ruling AKP any longer. The truth came out during the actual Bush-Erdogan meeting which was extended beyond the scheduled time. President Bush introduced PM Erdogan as 'his friend and a man of peace' which was also a strong indication of the harmony between the two leaders on serious issues. After the event, Foreign Minister Gul was characterizing the meeting as genuinely extraordinary. It seems Turkey and the US talked about everything that they were supposed to. Besides, the discussions went on amidst a warm and sympathetic atmosphere. At some point, President Bush noted that only strategic partners can engage in such a comprehensive dialogue. During the press event, PM Erdogan started his remarks by calling Bush 'the president of our strategic partner' which was a clear signal of a new state of Turkish-American relations."

In the Papers

Buyukanit Warns against Islamist Threat in Turkey
All papers: The head of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) General Yasar Buyukanit addressed the Istanbul War Academy yesterday, saying that Turkey's secular regime faces a fundamentalist threat. "There is a reactionary threat in Turkey, and every kind of measure must be taken against this threat," Buyukanit said. Turkish military support the country's EU aspirations, but has the right to defend itself against EU criticism, he noted. Buyukanit referred to recent comments by the European Commission representative in Turkey, Hansjorg Kretschmer, sharply criticizing the Turkish military's habit of expressing its views on civilian issues. "The Turkish military is trying to stay out of politics. I am a soldier doing his duty as defined in the constitution," Buyukanit said, rejecting criticism he was threatening democracy.

Turkish markets showed little reaction to the speech. Cumhuriyet speculates the Buyukanit statement will prompt visiting EU Commissioner Olli Rehn to issue in response strong warnings to Turkey. Mainstream papers comment that Buyukanit, the hardliner new chief of TGS, made clear he shared the fears of other military top

brass and of President Sezer over the alleged Islamist activities in Turkey. Cumhuriyet says the ruling AKP refrained from responding with strong statements to Buyukanit's remarks, with a party leader, Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat, merely disagreeing with the TGS chief by saying fundamentalism constituted no threat in Turkey.

Iraq Names Special Envoy for Countering the PKK
Zaman and Yeni Safak report the Iraqi government has appointed the Iraqi minister for security, Shirwan al-Waaily, as the special envoy for countering the PKK. Al-Waaily is a Shiite with military background and close ties to Prime Minister al-Maliki.

Kurdish Party Wants to Discuss with Erdogan the PKK Ceasefire
Milliyet reports following the PKK call for a ceasefire, Turkey's main Kurdish party DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk and his deputy Aysel Tugluk asked for an appointment with Prime Minister Erdogan to suggest a declaration of general amnesty, change of the election system and further democratic openings in order for the organization to lay down arms completely. Serafettin Elci, a former Kurdish-descent cabinet minister, and the influential anti-PKK Kurdish politician Abdulmelik Firat welcomed the PKK ceasefire declaration, stressing the organization should totally cease armed struggle. DTP said it will also ask for meetings with cabinet ministers and other political parties in the parliament to discuss the matter.

TV Highlights

ANKARA 00005746 003 OF 003

NTV (8 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Professor Ali Bardakoglu, Turkish religious directorate Diyanet chief, said he deemed important the warnings of President Sezer for combating fundamentalism.
- Turkey's main Kurdish party DTP's Diyarbakir branch and 12 other NGOs have announced that the ceasefire declared by the PKK was a chance for the organization to lay down all weapons.
- EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn visits Ankara to meet with Parliament Speaker Arinc, Prime Minister Erdogan, Justice Minister Cicek, and chief EU negotiator Babacan. Rehn will also take part in "European Social Model and Union Rights" gathering to be held by Turkish and Finnish labor confederations.
- In a meeting today the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) is to discuss objections to compulsory religious education in Turkish schools.
- Twelve have been injured in an explosion in the Aegean port city of Izmir.

International News

- Ankara told Brussels it was ready to discuss the Finnish EU term presidency proposal for launching direct trade between the EU and Turkish Cypriots in exchange for approval of the customs union protocol by the Turkish parliament. The Finnish proposal also envisages the handing over of the ghost-town of Maras (Varosha) to the UN.
- International Herald Tribune comments the main purpose of Pope Benedict's forthcoming trip to Turkey in November is to discuss with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew a Catholic-Orthodox union rather than seeking dialogue with Islam.
- Georgia, acting to defuse its worst crisis with Russia for years, said on Monday it would hand over to European intermediaries four Russian military officers detained on espionage charges.

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